

Huertas-Canova House (called "Prince Murat House")
250 St. George Street at northwest corner of Bridge
Street
St. Augustine
St. Johns County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-14

HABS
FLA

55- SAUG

7-

An addendum to
Prince Murat House (now Coffee House)
Saint George and Bridge Streets
St. Augustine, Florida
in HABS Catalog (1941)

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HUERTAS-CANOVA HOUSE (CALLED "PRINCE MURAT HOUSE")

HABS
FLA

55 SAUG

7 -

~~Addendum to~~

Prince Murat House (now Coffee House)
Saint George and Bridge Streets
St. Augustine, Florida
in HABS Catalog, (1941)

Address: 250 St. George Street at northwest corner of
Bridge Street, St. Augustine, St. Johns County,
Florida.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mr. Kenneth Dow, 250 St. George Street, St.
Augustine, Florida.

Present Use: Residence.

Statement of
Significance: The Huertas-Canova House, which popularly is called
the Prince Murat House, reputedly was the residence
of Prince Charles Louis Napoleon Achille Murat, son
of the former King of Naples and Caroline, sister
of Napoleon Bonaparte, for a brief period. (Prince
Murat married Catherine Daingerfield Willis Gray,
great-grandniece of George Washington).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and subsequent owners: The research for the
following chain of title was done by Alberta Johnson,
librarian of the Florida Historical Society, in December
1938. The Society was then located in St. Augustine,
Florida. A copy of the chain of title was received from
the St. Augustine Historical Society on 24 March, 1965.

1791- Escrituras Webb Memorial Library
p.129 May 6, Andres Ximanez, for Antonio Huertas, granted lot #257
for the taxes and mortgages it for security.

1815 Title July 4, Gov. J. J. Estrada y Toro gives title to Antonio
p.106V Huertas in lot 257, block 37, for which he gave mortgage May
6, 1791; measures north-south 29 yds. east-west 69 yds. Bounded
east by St. George St. north by Nicholas Estefanopoly, south
by cross street leading to the swamp, west by swamp (Maria
Sanche Creek).

- - - - -

St. Johns County Archives Deed Book "A-1" p. 104

1821 Dec. 31, Deed Antonio Huertas to Antonio Canova, same de-
scription as in title of 1815, with all of its appurtenances,

privileges, titles etc. purchase price, \$1000.00. This transfer of title to property does not specify any buildings upon this lot, but in comparing the purchase price with others of the same period, it is believed that the two house, the so-called Prince Murat and the coquina house #46 Bridge St. included in the estate of Antonio Canova, had both been built by Huertas during the second Spanish occupation and before the sale to Antonio Canova.

The lot extending from St. George St. to Cordova St. (marsh at that time) remained in possession of the Canova family until 1877, when by the will of Antonio Canova (1869) the property was divided.

St. Johns County Archives Deed Book "X" p. 15

1877 Aug. 7, B. F. Oliveros, Commissioner, by order of the Probate Court sold to Amos C. Spear, Spear to J. P. Howard, lot #13, with stone house, bounded south by Bridge St., north John C. Canova (now Spear) west by Ramon Canova estate, being the same premises conveyed by A. Huertas, 1821.

St. Johns County Archives, Order Book "A" p. 71

1869 July 17, Will of Antonio Canova "#257, block 37, fronting on St. George St. 45 ft., Bridge St. east-west 75 ft. to John Canova, balance to wife Margaret and at her death to be divided with children John, Paul, Raphael, Antonio, Crescencio and Ramon, and daughter Marcella."

St. Johns County Archives File Case "C-4"

1877- Paul B. Canova VS Camilla Canova, filed April 10, 1877, Bond of F. J. Ponce and Paul B. Canova, Executors of will of Antonio Canova, "to made faithful distribution and appropriation of certain monies arising from sale of certain real estate sold at public auction, May 7, 1877, B. F. Oliveros, Com. Paul Canova had filed petition to sell as the rents and income from the property was not sufficient for the expenses of the remaining heirs of estate.

1830- Deed Book "Z" pp 117-119

John P. Howard to Amos C. Spear, with other property deed to lot with tenements, etc. bounded east by St. George St. south by Bridge St. west by Col. Albert Tracy. Spear sold to Mollie Pease, 1906 Pease to Hayden; this is followed [sic] by numerous mortgages, satisfaction of mortgages and deeds, between Pease, Hayden, Lindsley, Pespas to present owner, Miss Helen Meeker.

Although this house is called the "Prince Murat" there is no record of his claiming title but it is believed, by descendants

of Antonio Canova, that he either rented a part of the house or was a guest there during the lifetime of Antonio Canova, as for many years the Murat name has been connected with this well-built coquina house.

The Estefanopoly lot (adjoining south line of the "Ancient Spanish Church" lot) was acquired by Antonio Canova in 1855 and included in lot 11, 12, 13 and 14 later dived [sic] and sold.

In 1957 the property was owned by Helen H. Meeker.

2. Date of erection: Probably erected between 1815 and 1821.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Research has not validated the local tradition that Prince Murat lived in the house at the northwest corner of St. George and Bridge Streets even for a brief period. However, from April, 1824, when he first arrived in Florida, until his death at his Econchatti Plantation near Tallahassee, Florida on April 15, 1847 at the age of 46, he visited St. Augustine innumerable times--for it was from this port that he embarked on his trips to the North and to Europe. It is known that he rented a house in St. Augustine in April, 1824. ("A few days after my arrival I rented a small house with a rather pretty garden." Quoted by A. J. Hanna in his biography of Prince Achille Murat, A Prince In Their Midst, on p. 72). His residence was brief, however, for he bought a 1,200 acre "estate," Parthenope, (at intersection of the Mantanzas River and Moses Creek), within two months. This was two years before he met and married Catherine ("Kate") Daingerfield Willis Gray in Tallahassee. The two stayed in a boarding-house in St. Augustine in March, 1927 to await the sloop which was to take them on their wedding trip to the North to visit his uncle, Joseph Bonaparte, on his estate at Point Breeze in New Jersey.

It has been claimed that Prince Murat's wife lived in the Huertas-Canova House during the Second Seminole Indian War, which lasted from 1835 to 1842. Only further detailed research might indicate that this "fact" is historically accurate.

C. Sources of Information:

Hanna, A.J. A Prince In Their Midst: The Adventurous Life of Achille Murat on the American Frontier. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946.

Long, Ellen Call. Florida Breezes. Jacksonville, Florida:
Ashmead Brothers, 1883.

St. Johns County Records, County Court House, Charlotte
Street, St. Augustine, Florida.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

An extensive bibliography can be found in the A. J. Hanna
book, A Prince In Their Midst. Of particular value are the
names of collections that contain letters written by Prince
Murat.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Huertas-Canova House is a
typical one-and-a-half-story, coquina St. Augustine
house of the early nineteenth century. Because of its
supposed association with the Murats and its picturesque
qualities, it is one of the city's major points of
interest for tourists.
2. Condition: Partially restored and renovated; well
maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories and bays: One-and-a-half stories;
three-bay front.
Over-all dimensions: 32'-3 1/2" (front) x 28'-0" with
12'-0" x 18'-10 1/2 rear ell and 10'-6 1/2" deep rear
addition.
Layout: Rectangular with rear ell and rectangular rear
addition in the right angle formed by this ell.
2. Wall construction: Plastered coquina.
3. Porches, stoops: A wooden frame balcony projects from
south (street) side of upper story; it has a shed roof
and crude wooden decorative details. A one-step stone
stoop is at the main entry on St. George Street.
4. Chimneys: Stone chimneys.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: Simple wooden door frames with
simple vertical board and paneled wooden doors, and
two-section louvered doors.

55- SAUG

7-

- b. Windows and shutters: Simple wooden window frames with nine-over-six double-hung wooden sash. Windows on first floor have either paneled or louvered wooden shutters.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main section and the rear ell both have gable roofs; the rear addition has a low, hipped roof.
- b. Eaves: Simple wooden eaves.
- c. Dormers: Two pitched-roof dormers on the front elevation.

C. Description of Interior

- 1. Floor plans: First floor has central-hall plan with rear ell and single-room rear addition; the attic story has a central-hall plan.
- 2. Stairways: Solid-newel, two-run wooden staircase with simple wooden handrails, square balusters, and both turned and chamfered newel posts.
- 3. Flooring: Modern tile flooring.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster on coquina, and exposed wooden rafters and boards in upper story.
- 5. Doors: Vertical board doors.
- 6. Decorative trim: Simple wooden trim.
- 7. Heating: Fireplace with mantel with relatively simple pilaster and reeded-panel motifs.

D. Site

- 1. Orientation and general setting: House faces east on St. George Street. The east (front) wall is directly at the sidewalk line. The south (side) wall is almost at the Bridge Street curb line.
- 2. Landscaping: Since it is immediately adjacent to the sidewalk and curb, the house has no front or side yards or plantings. It has only a rear garden, which is enclosed by a masonry wall.